



DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE
STATE OF MISSOURI
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*Serving, promoting and protecting the agricultural producers, processors
and consumers of Missouri's food, fuel and fiber products.*

**Missouri Department of Agriculture Statement
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management
February 28, 2006**

Good morning Chairman Moran and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Fred Ferrell, director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture. As I come before you this morning, I am very appreciative of your attention to policies set forth by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) regarding potential crop damage caused by spring pulses set forth by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

This department I am charged to lead has the following mission statement: serving, promoting, and protecting the agricultural producers, processors, and consumers of Missouri's food, fuel and fiber products. Agriculture is Missouri's largest industry, represented by approximately six billion dollars in farm gate production last year. Our state is a national leader in beef, hay, turkey, and swine production. Our most important agricultural ranking is that we are second in the number of farms and farm families. This ranking is one that I'm the proudest of and one that I will fight the hardest to preserve.

Agriculture is a challenging business, not unlike other industry sectors. However, I cannot name another industry with a greater level of risk adversity. In Missouri, as in many other states, our farmers are reeling from the effects of a devastating drought, as well as ever-increasing input costs and land values. These factors are just a few examples of issues out of our immediate control that place pressure on the diminishing profit margins of our constituents.

Despite these pressures, the Federal Government has decided to place another critical issue on the backs of Missouri's bottomland farmers through the implementation of the 2005-2006 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) calling for two spring "pulses" on the Missouri River in March and May 2006. In the AOP, the Corps refers to the plan as "adaptive management...one tool to preclude jeopardy to pallid sturgeon." I'm here this morning to tell you that Missouri's bottomland farmers will be the ones placed in jeopardy by this unnecessary experiment in which Missouri remains fundamentally opposed.

To make matters worse, RMA has made clear that any losses in crop production associated with the Corps' proceedings cannot be covered by Federal crop insurance policies. RMA states: "Given the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers confidence that flooding is not expected to occur as a result of the releases, USDA does not anticipate that there will be any losses attributable solely to the releases." This statement is very disturbing to me. Missouri officials have advised at every occurrence that in the lower River basin, a natural spring "pulse" takes place each and every year.

The effects of adding another one to three feet of water to our farmland at a time when extra water is not needed could be devastating. Crops could very well be destroyed, or at a minimum, costly delays in planting could be created, leading to lower yields at harvest time. These lower yields equate to depressed farm income, which in turn, hurts our communities and our state's economy.

The Missouri River's bottomlands are home to some of the most fertile and productive cropland in our state, with river corridor counties contributing over one billion dollars to Missouri's economy. This does not take into account ripple effects created by supporting industries such as transportation, livestock, grain handlers, and countless others.

I recently returned from Washington D.C., where the annual mid-year National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) meeting was held. I want to inform you that NASDA supports Missouri's opposition to the spring "pulse" on the Missouri River. At my request, NASDA President Carlton Courter of Virginia sent letters to the RMA and the Federal Crop Insurance Board of Directors advising that any crop losses caused by a Corps decision to intentionally flood the Missouri River should be covered by the RMA. This action is significant, as NASDA as a whole represents many constituencies and interest groups.

To conclude, I again want to thank you, Chairman Moran and subcommittee members, for hosting this hearing in Jefferson City. I trust in your ability and judgment to do everything in your power to ensure that our farmers – the most efficient in the world - are not subjected to further undue harm.